

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACCORDING TO THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES PREFERENCES AT GATEWAY LEARNING CENTER, HPA-AN TOWNSHIP, KAREN STATE, MYANMAR

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate if there was a significant difference between students' attitudes toward learning EFL according to their preferences for instructional strategies at Gateway Learning Center, Hpa-an Township, Karen State, Myanmar. This research was a quantitative comparative design utilizing two questionnaires: Attitudes Toward Learning English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire (ATLEFLQ) and Instructional Strategies Preferences Questionnaire (ISPQ) to collect data. The data were collected from 203 students in November and December, 2017. The researcher analyzed the data using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages) and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for statistical hypothesis testing. The findings indicated that the students had positive attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language and the most preferred instructional strategy for learning EFL was mixed instructional strategy, followed by experiential learning, interactive instruction, indirect instruction, direct instruction and finally independent study. There was no significant difference between students' attitudes toward learning EFL according to their preferences for instructional strategies. Recommendations for students, teachers, administrators and future researchers are provided.

Key Words: Attitudes, English as a foreign language, differentiated instruction, instructional strategies preferences, Myanmar

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Introduction

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, known as Burma before 1989 is a diverse country made up of 135 ethnic groups who speak different languages. English has been the only foreign language used in Myanmar and there has been a long history of EFL teaching and learning in Myanmar (Clifford & Htut, 2015). In Myanmar, English is a compulsory subject from kindergarten onwards which aims to develop all four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. However, in reality, listening and speaking skills are ignored in teaching and assessment in the Myanmar education system (Paw, 2015). According to Sein (2015), 60 % of Myanmar teachers had not attended any course on the teaching of English which is the subject they need training in most among all the subjects they teach. Teachers mostly use grammar-translation method translating English words and sentences into Myanmar because the focus of English language teaching is reading and writing.

Teacher-centered approaches, rote learning, and memorization have become the primary teaching style of EFL education in Myanmar (Sein, 2015). Moreover, students have very limited exposure to spoken English so that they encounter challenges when it comes to speaking English (Phyu, 2017).

According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), language mastery is not only influenced by language competence but also by the students' attitudes and motivation toward the target language. The teacher plays an important role to manage their instructional strategies and to stimulate students to have higher levels of motivation and positive attitudes towards learning EFL by making learning easier, faster, more enjoyable and more effective, all of which lead to the student's achievement.

Each student has their own preferences for instructional strategies and different educational experiences. Therefore, educators should identify students' preferences and value individual differences by trying to embed students' favored teaching strategies into the classroom instruction in order to help them with classroom engagement and higher achievement in learning EFL (McCombs & Miller, 2007). The students can become involved in the learning process and meet the learning objectives if teachers teach with appropriate instructional strategies (Tomlinson, 2001).

Differentiated instruction is one of the most suitable ways to meet the learning needs of each student as differentiated instruction can contribute more learning opportunities for students to obtain better achievement in learning (Tomlinson, 2001). Flexible and differentiated instruction gives students choices to feel more positive and more engaged in the teaching and learning process (Hall, Strangman & Meyer, 2003).

Research Objectives

The following research objectives were developed for this study.

1. To determine the students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at Gateway Learning Center, Hpa-an Township, Karen State, Myanmar.
2. To determine the students' preferences among five instructional strategies: direct instruction, indirect instruction, experiential learning, independent study interactive and instruction for EFL at Gateway Learning Center, Hpa-an Township, Karen State, Myanmar.
3. To determine whether there is a significant difference between the students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language (EFL) according to their instructional strategies preferences at Gateway learning center, Hpa-an Township, Karen State, Myanmar.

Literature Review

Language Learning Attitudes

Language learning attitudes refer to a state of mind or disposition of a person to evaluate or express how they feel about, think about, like or dislike a language. Attitude is considered as a powerful factor influencing language performance and it plays an important role in language learning as it affects students' success or failure in their learning process.

For example, if a learner is not interested in or dislikes learning a language, he/she will hold negative attitudes and will not be motivated or enthusiastic to learn. Therefore, Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggested that the ability of a student to master a second language is not only influenced by students' language skills competence but also by their motivation and attitudes.

Gardner's Socio-Educational Model

Gardner's socio-educational model of second language acquisition offers a fundamental research model to study the aspect of attitudes and motivation in learning another language. Gardner started developing his socio-educational model describing the relation of attitude and motivational variables to achievement in language learning (Gardner, 1985). One aspect of the model focuses on the link between three of the constructs: motivation, attitudes toward the learning situation, and integrativeness. It is suggested that an individual who is integratively motivated to learn the other language will show high levels in all three aspects. Thus, this model proposes that integrative motivation can play an important role in the acquisition of another language (Gardner, 2006).

Attitudes/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB)

The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) refers to the international version of the test designed by Gardner to measure the level of attitudes and motivation of second language learners. In this study, it is an instrument that is used to measure the students' attitudes in learning English through the three subscales namely: attitudes toward English teacher, attitudes toward English class and attitudes toward learning English in this study.

Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction with Five Instructional Strategies

Differentiated instruction is a method of designing and delivering instruction for different students with different ways to best reach each student. A differentiated classroom provides diverse occasions to acquire content, to make sense of the teaching process and to develop learning outcomes so that individual students who have various backgrounds, readiness, skill levels, and interests can learn effectively (Tomlinson, 2001). Tomlinson (2010) pointed out that teachers should be aware of student differences and adjust their teaching styles to the class through differentiated instruction. The students can become involved in the learning process and meet the learning objectives if teachers teach with suitable instructional strategies. Differentiated instruction gives more learning opportunities for students to gain better achievement in learning and also offers a specific plan for teachers to make productive differentiated lessons (Tomlinson, 2001). Instructional strategies can be categorized into five types: direct instruction, indirect instruction, interactive instruction, experiential learning and independent study. These instructional strategies are based on the learning theories of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism (Dabbagh, 2002).

Conceptual Framework

This study was a comparative study which investigated the students' attitudes toward learning EFL according to their instructional strategies preferences at Gateway Learning Center, Hpa-an Township, Karen

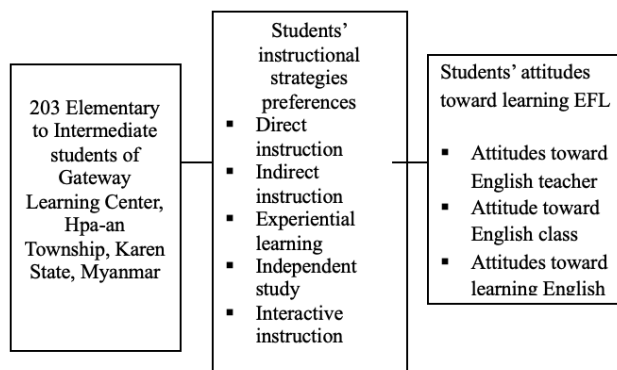


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Method

This research was a quantitative comparative study which utilized a questionnaire as the research instrument.

Participants

The participants of this study were 203 students from the elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate levels of EFL class at the Gateway Learning Center, Hpa-an Township, Karen State, Myanmar in 2017.

Research Instrument

A research questionnaire was used to collect data in this study. This was the Attitudes Towards Learning English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire (ATLEFLQ) adapted from Gardner's (2004) AMTB and Gama and Lynch's (2016) Instructional Strategies Preferences Questionnaire (ISPQ). There were three parts in the questionnaire: students' demographic information, Attitudes Toward Learning English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire (ATLEFLQ) and Instructional Strategies Preferences Questionnaire (ISPQ).

Attitudes Toward Learning English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire (ATLEFLQ)

The ATLEFLQ was adapted from Gardner's AMTB International Version (Gardner, 2004). This study operated only three subscales which are from two major components of the AMTB: attitudes towards the learning situation and motivation.

Two subscales, attitudes towards English teacher (teacher evaluation) and attitude towards English class (class evaluation), are from the attitudes toward the learning situation, and attitudes toward learning English is from motivation.

A six-point Likert scale was used to measure students' agreement level regarding attitudes toward learning English. There are 30 items with three indicator scales to measure attitudes towards learning EFL.

Validity and Reliability of the ATLEFLQ

The ATLEFLQ was adapted from Gardner's AMTB which has been widely used by many researchers to investigate the affective components of second language acquisition. The internal consistency reliability of AMTB scales was satisfactory and the AMTB has been validated and standardized (Gardner, 1985). Dörnyei (2001) stated that the AMTB has good construct and predictive validity that can be used as a standardized motivation test. Ushioda and Dörnyei (2012) also stated that the AMTB has good content and construct validity. The internal consistency reliability of ATLEFLQ was interpreted as good because Cronbach's alpha value for this study was .84.

Instructional Strategies Preferences Questionnaire (ISPQ)

The ISPQ was adapted from Gama and Lynch (2016) which comprised 25 items with five items for each instructional strategy. There are five instructional strategies which are direct instruction, indirect instruction, experiential learning and independent study and interactive instruction. A six-point Likert-type scale was used to find the students' instructional strategies preferences.

Validity and Reliability of the ISPQ

The ISPQ questionnaire was developed by Gama and Lynch (2016) and surveyed 176 students at the Escola Secundaria Catolica De Sao Jose Opoerario in Dili, Timor-Leste. The questionnaire was validated by three educational experts. The overall Cronbach's alpha value of the ISPQ was .87 which can be interpreted that student's preferences among five instructional strategies were good. The internal consistency reliability of ISPQ for this current study was also interpreted as good because Cronbach's alpha value was .86.

Collection of Data

Data were collected on November and December in 2017. The researcher distributed a total of 203 questionnaires to the target population and the respondents' valid return rate was

100% with 91 (44.8%) male and 112 (55.2%) female students.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed based on each objective by using a statistical software program. For Research Objective 1, descriptive statistics involving means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) were used to determine the students' attitudes toward learning EFL at Gateway Learning Center. For Research Objective 2, the highest mean scores were used to determine the students' instructional strategies preferences. Then, frequencies (*f*) and percentages (%) were calculated to determine the students' instructional strategies preferences. For Research Objective 3, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed to compare the students' attitudes towards learning EFL according to their preferences for instructional strategies at Gateway Learning Center.

Findings

Research Objective 1

The findings of the study are presented according to the research objectives.

Table 1 presents the interpretation of mean scores and standard deviations for each subscale of attitudes toward learning EFL among the 203 respondents.

Table 1: Interpretation of Mean scores and Standard Deviations for Each Subscale of Attitudes Toward Learning EFL (n= 203)

Learning attitudes	M	SD	Interpretation
Attitudes toward English teacher	4.93	.52	Positive
Attitudes toward English class	4.87	.62	Positive
Attitudes toward learning English	5.23	.52	Positive
Total	5.01	.48	Positive

According to Table 15, the maximum mean score for each subscale was attitudes toward learning English ($M = 5.23$), followed by attitudes toward English teacher ($M = 4.93$) and attitudes toward English class ($M = 4.87$). The total summary mean-score was 5.01. Therefore, students' total attitudes toward learning EFL were positive based on the interpretation scores of the ATLEFLQ.

Research Objective 2

For Research Objective 2, the highest mean scores were used to determine students' instructional strategies preferences. Based on the data analysis, the researcher categorized students' instructional strategies preferences into six types according to their highest mean scores because some students had two or more than two instructional strategies preferences at the same time. For the group which had two or more than two instructional strategies preferences was named as mixed instructional strategy. Thus, the findings could be a single instructional strategy among five instructional strategies or a mixed instructional strategy. Table 2 shows the frequencies and percentages for each subscale of the instructional strategies preferences among the 203 participants.

Table 2: Frequencies and Percentages for Each Subscale of the Instructional Strategies Preferences (n=203)

Instructional strategies preferences	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Percentage (%)
Direct instruction	23	11.3
Indirect instruction	24	11.8
Experiential learning	46	22.7
Independent study	5	2.5
Interactive instruction	34	16.7
Mixed instructional strategy	71	35.0
Total	203	100

Table 16 shows that the maximum frequency and percentage of students' preferences

for instructional strategies was mixed (two or more than two strategies) instructional strategy ($f=71$, 35.0%), followed by experiential learning ($f=46$, 22.7%), interactive instruction ($f=34$, 16.7%), indirect instruction ($f=24$, 11.8 %), direct instruction ($f=23$, 11.3 %) and independent study ($f=5$, 2.5 %).

Research Objective 3

Table 3 presents the results of a one-way ANOVA test comparing the students' attitudes toward learning EFL according to their instructional strategies preferences.

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA Summary Table of Comparing the Students' Attitudes Toward Learning EFL According to Their Instructional Strategies Preferences

Variable	Variable categories	N	M	SD	Df			
					Between group	Within group	F	p
Instructional strategies preferences	Direct instruction	23	4.82	.78	5	197	.75	.58
	Indirect							
	Instruction	24	5.05	.67				
	Experiential							
	Learning	46	5.19	.56				
	Independent study	5	4.67	.69				
	Interactive							
	instruction	34	5.03	.66				
	Mixed instructional strategy	71	4.06	1.81				

Note. There was no statistically difference between groups (statistical significance level set at $p = .05$).

Table 17 indicates the results of the one-way ANOVA test comparing the students' attitudes toward learning EFL according to their preferences for instructional strategies. The research hypothesis stated that there is a significant difference between the students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language (EFL) according to their instructional strategies preferences at Gateway learning center, Hpa-an Township, Karen State, Myanmar, at a significance level of .05.

The results showed that there was no significant difference between the students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language according to their instructional strategies preferences because of F - value = .75, and the significance p - value = .58 which was bigger than .05.

Since there was no significant difference between the students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language (EFL) according to their instructional strategies preferences at Gateway Learning Center, it was not necessary to run a post hoc test.

Discussion

Language Learning Attitudes

The findings from this study indicated that the students' attitudes toward English teacher were positive. It was reported that they were also looking forward to going to class because their English teacher was so good. According to the researcher's teaching experiences at GLC, most EFL teachers from GLC were very enthusiastic and happy about teaching. Moreover, the teachers from GLC were approachable and helpful to the students by offering equal support to all levels of learners. These teacher performances and behaviors could explain why students had positive attitudes towards learning EFL at Gateway Learning Center.

The students also scored high on attitudes toward English class which indicated their attitudes toward English class were positive. This suggested that the curriculum, the content, lesson plans, assessments, games, projects, and teaching methods with different classroom activities were interesting and encouraged students to have a positive orientation towards learning English. The teachers used flexible grouping styles and allowed students to have some choices in the assignments including inquiry and project-based assignments. However, Item 5 of the attitudes questionnaire (ATLEFLQ) reported that students had a hard time thinking of anything positive about their English class with slightly negative attitudes. The researcher assumed that this was because of their past experiences in learning at government school with out-of-date curriculum, no activities for communication skills, test-based assessment design, grammar-translation method and rote learning. This tallies with Eshghinejad (2016) who noted that the learners' attitudes as embodied in feelings, beliefs, likes, dislikes, and needs should be considered as these attitudes influence the language learning process.

The findings of this study also revealed that the students' attitudes toward learning English were positive. The findings indicated that students thought learning English was really great and learning English was not a waste of time. It indicated that the students of GLC had favorable attitudes toward learning English. The findings of this study agreed with a study done by Manachon and Eamoraphan (2017) in Bangkok, Thailand showed that students had positive attitudes toward EFL which included attitudes towards English teacher, class, textbook and class work.

Instructional Strategies Preferences

This study focused on five instructional strategies: direct instruction, indirect instruction, interactive instruction, experiential learning and independent study. The researcher categorized students' instructional strategies preferences into six groups as some students preferred mixed (two or more than two) instructional strategy at the same time. The findings of this study demonstrated that the most preferred

instructional strategies for learning EFL was mixed instructional strategy. The second most preferred instructional strategy was experiential learning. Interactive instruction was the third most preferred instructional strategy. Indirect instruction was the fourth most preferred instructional strategy and direct instruction was the fifth most preferred instructional strategy. The least preferred instructional strategy was independent study.

Among 203 students, 71 (35 %) preferred mixed instructional strategy. Among them, 39 students preferred two strategies, 17 students preferred three strategies, six students preferred four strategies and eight students preferred all five strategies equally at the same time, according to the data. From these findings, it can be concluded that no single teaching strategy will work well with the students from Gateway Learning Center. The findings suggested that students could learn better when the teacher combines various types of instructional strategies rather than using a single strategy.

The findings indicated that experiential learning was the second most preferred instructional strategy. The students participated in classroom simulation activities for speaking skill as if they were bringing the world to the classroom. These activities included, for example, visiting foreign countries, shopping, booking a hotel and job interviewing. Also, there were book clubs and movie clubs as extracurricular activities for the students where they could improve reading skills and practice English speaking and public speaking skills with their friends and alumni at GLC. Moreover, they participated in field trips, art projects, and service learning projects, and debates as experiential learning during their study at GLC. This finding supports Wurdinger and Carlson (2010) where they suggested that students can gain skills, knowledge, and experience not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom.

Interactive instruction was the third most preferred instructional strategy for learning EFL according to the findings of this study. At GLC, four to five students sit as a group. As a result, teachers often structured pair or group tasks or assignments by asking each group member to be responsible for a different aspect of a task. Since interactive instruction comprises both student-centered and teacher-centered methods, the students can learn from teachers as well as their peers. According to Gall and Gillett (2001), students learn better in groups than as individuals because it offers opportunities for learners to be able to adapt to different conditions of learning.

Indirect instruction was the fourth most preferred instructional strategy for learning EFL in this study. This might be a function of the teachers often using group discussion method. The researcher experienced that the students were active in giving their opinions to the class when the teachers gave them a case study or a topic to discuss. The teacher served as a facilitator and students tried to communicate, engage and contribute their opinions or ideas to understand a concept or to analyze, and solve problems with or without the guidance of the teachers.

The findings of the study indicated that direct instructional strategy was the fifth most preferred instructional strategy for learning EFL. Although it is an essentially teacher-centered method, the findings indicated that the students from GLC still preferred direct instruction in learning EFL because it is a strategy that teachers often use when teaching specific facts, basic skills and new knowledge.

When the teachers carefully prepare the detailed lesson plans for the desired outcomes for EFL learners, the students might think that they understand clearly when the teacher delivers details and facts such as phonetics, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar rules. This also corresponds to the notion that teacher-centered and learner-centered approaches do not represent an instructional dichotomy, but rather a continuum that both teachers and students can benefit from (Rüütman & Kipper, 2011).

Independent study was the least preferred instructional strategy for learning EFL in this study. According to Pintrich (2000), independent study is self-regulated learning which can accelerate the development of individual creativity, self-confidence, and self-improvement. However, the findings showed that many of the students did not engage in independent study and they had less interest in doing individual or group independent assignments and self-regulated learning activities.

One of the reasons the researcher assumed why they disliked independent learning is that they did not have wide access to the internet or other relevant sources to increase knowledge and skills for their assignments through independent study. Also, the researcher found that it frequently took longer for the learners to learn through independent learning activities than through a classroom setting with friends and teachers. As well, most students did not want to do their homework or assignments independently because they were lazy sometimes or they may have felt that they had no friends with whom to practice their knowledge of learning English and did not have a teacher to correct their mistakes.

Comparing Students' Attitudes Toward Learning EFL According to Their Instructional Strategies Preferences

The findings of this study concluded that there was no significant difference in students' attitudes toward learning EFL according to their preferences for instructional strategies at Gateway Learning Center. The findings of this study had similar results with Gama and Lynch (2016) and Shell and Lynch (in press). Gama and Lynch conducted a comparative study of the students' motivation for learning social studies according to their instructional strategies preferences at a high school in Dili, Timor-Leste.

The study found that there was no significant difference in students' motivation for learning social studies according to their preferences for instructional strategies in Grade 10 and Grade 11. Gama and Lynch (2016) found that the students'

most preferred instructional strategy was direct instruction because it was the only strategy they had ever experienced and the teachers who focused on the textbooks were the only sources of knowledge.

Another comparative study related to students' motivation for learning English as a foreign language and their instructional strategies preferences in Grades 9-12 was conducted by Shell and Lynch (in press) at an international school in Bangkok, Thailand. That study also found that there was no significant difference in students' motivation for learning EFL and their preferences for instructional strategies in Grade 9-12. The findings showed that the most preferred instructional strategy of students was experiential learning. The reason was that the American curriculum used at the school focused on student-centered rather than teacher-centered methodologies (Shell & Lynch, in press).

The findings of this study had similar findings of no significant difference in students' attitudes toward learning EFL and their preferences for instructional strategies at GLC, Hpa-an, Karen State, Myanmar. The different findings of this study indicated that mixed instructional strategy was the most preferred instructional strategy at Gateway Learning Center. The researcher assumes that students from GLC learn better when teachers use differentiated instructional strategies because these instructional strategies ensure that students are never bored and they were likely to engage longer. Hall, Strangman and Meyer (2003) also noted that flexible and differentiated instruction gives students choices to feel more positive and more engaged in the teaching and learning process. As Meador (2016) claimed, not every instructional strategy will be the perfect fit for every situation, so teachers must adapt in evaluating which strategy will be the best fit in their own contexts.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Students

The students should make sure which teaching methods and classroom activities are the most effective for them. Then, the students should ask teachers for differentiation of teaching strategies, classroom activities, and assessment types that work best for them so that the teachers can adjust them in order to best reach every student.

Recommendations for Teachers

The teachers should be aware of which teaching strategies are the most and the least preferred by students in order to adjust required resources for the content, instructional strategies and classroom activities. The teachers should use differentiated teaching strategies for various English proficiency levels of students, using a variety of classroom activities, projects, and assessments, as well as interesting books or handouts. They should also employ flexible seating arrangements to make more positive changes for classroom atmosphere.

Recommendations for Administrators

The researcher suggests that administrators facilitate digital platforms for the teachers and students due to the affordance of interactive technology to encourage self-regulated study. The administrators should arrange some projects that allow students to interact with English speaking people for educational purposes not only in the classroom but also beyond classroom activities. Also, the researcher recommends that administrators organize in-school professional development meetings and training for teachers on topics related to attitudes and motivation for learning English as well as teaching and learning strategies, including differentiated instruction.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

The researcher recommends that future researchers conduct larger studies in learning English as a foreign language in Myanmar to get a better view and greater in-depth findings as this study was conducted at only Gateway Learning Center, so that the findings cannot be generalized to other learning centers in Myanmar.

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